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Desert Voice Magazine
Serving U.S. and Coalition Forces in Kuwait

January 3, 2007

Sailors soaring

**Navy pilots patrol the skies of
Southwest Asia to support the mission
of Third Army/U.S. Army Central**

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U.S. FORSCOM Ground Forces Band performs in Kuwait for holidays

On the cover

Lt. j.g. Evan Young, a Navy co-pilot with Helicopter Combat Support Squadron-4, flies a MH-53E "Black Stallion" helicopter while keeping an eye on fellow co-pilots and crew flying another helicopter ferrying troops from Iraq to Kuwait.

Photo by Sgt. Sarah Scully

2007 Your reenlistment options

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- ▶ **\$15,000 bonus** for a six-year reenlistment
- ▶ **\$7,500 bonus** for a three-year reenlistment
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- ▶ Counselors can also help with **transitions to Active Reserve/Guard duty**
- ▶ **Call Sgt. 1st Class Jeffery McKenzie** at DSN 318-430-7193 for more reenlistment options

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Grease is the word

Mechanics counter dusty climate with lubricant

Story and photos by
Capt. Michael Wallace,
377th TSC PAO

The shifting desert sands of Kuwait may make a good setting for a movie, but for the Soldiers stationed in this dry country, the fine-gritted abrasive is a major enemy that bears constant preparation to counter.

"Grease is the word," said Petty Officer 1st Class Sean Poling, maintenance floor supervisor of for the Navy Seabees. "Lubrication is the simplest and most effective way to beat any abrasives when dealing with our equipment."

Southwest Asia sand is so fine it is carried in the air and gets into moving parts on equipment necessary to fulfill the mission of Third Army/U.S. Army Central. "Even the air carries it into every nook and cranny," agreed Sgt. Bryan Koch and Spc. Dennis Spiller, both direct support mechanics for the 96th Transportation Command.

Maintenance chiefs agree that the



Mechanics Sgt. Bryan Koch and Spc. Denis Spiller prove that no space is too small to properly implement lubrication on equipment. They say that operators are the first defense against the abrasive environment.

sand wears out equipment quickly, and the only thing that keeps the bushings and bearings from wearing out is proper operator maintenance, and following a strict lubrication schedule.

The Seabees lube all moving parts at least monthly.

"It depends on the lube charts. The operator should follow the chart," said Poling.

The 96th Transportation Command uses about 100 gallons of assorted weight lubrication oils and greases per month. The maintenance crews are better prepared now for keeping the sand, dust

and grit at bay than just a short time ago.

For Koch and Spiller, this is their third rotation to the desert. "We are set up to conduct good, quality maintenance in this extreme environment. It's a lot better than just a year ago," they said.

But no matter how great the unit maintenance is, the crucial maintenance is conducted by the operator. "All everyone has to do is follow the lubrication charts and schedules and the life expectancy of their equipment will be very long," said Poling.

"We wind up with the aftermath of poor maintenance," said Koch and Spiller, both pointing out a box of worn out gears and bearings. "Those worn out gears and bearings are the result of poor maintenance that could have been avoided with proper lubrication during daily operations."



Sgt. Bryan Koch and Spc. Denis Spiller follow environmental guidelines and dump oil from a recent oil change into an approved container. The two Soldiers say that the 96th Trans will use over 100 gallons of lubrication each month.



Photo by Spc. Debrah A. Robertson

A Soldier with the 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team unloads equipment from a Stryker prior to cleaning the vehicle during their recent redeployment. The 172nd SBCT utilized the Stryker extensively during their 16 months in Iraq.

Stryker increases troops' survivability

Spc. Debrah A. Robertson
Desert Voice Assistant Editor

I need pressure to stop this bleeding! Someone start an IV!

Brightly lit and teeming with medics, this is not an operating room or even an ambulance. This is a Medical Evacuation Stryker vehicle.

There are 10 different variants of the Stryker. Its smooth ride and heavy armor allow it to support multiple functions, from infantry

power to engineering teams to ambulatory services.

Each variant shares a common platform, said Gerald Pokorski, a logistical management specialist operating with the Project Management Office, Stryker Brigade Combat Team. This simplifies the process of repairing the Stryker because there are more interchangeable parts.

"All ten Stryker variants are 80 percent compatible chassis," said

Maj. Robbie Parke, the information operations officer of 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team. "This means ease of maintenance for our repair teams. Mechanics can now run the motor pool similar to a 'fleet,' which is easier and more cost effective."

"There was a lot of engineering to create the Stryker as a high-tech, combat vehicle," said Raymond Lopez, senior logistical analyst of PMO, SBCT.

"The Stryker was created to fill the

gap between heavy forces and light forces,” said Pokorski.

Gen. Eric Shinseki envisioned a vehicle such as the Stryker after the Bosnian War and the Gulf War. He wanted something with a punch that’s easily deployable, said Pokorski. He wanted a rapid deployment force with armored protection.

The Stryker fit the bill.

“The Stryker is extremely mobile and can cross urban terrain quickly and quietly,” said Parke, who is now utilizing the Stryker to its fullest capabilities on the streets of Baghdad.

“It has fairly good sprint speed and can pursue civilian cars with some degree of success,” Parke added.

The survivability of the Stryker when it is hit by an improvised explosive device is excellent, said Pokorski.

“I’m proud to work on a vehicle where Soldiers are willing to give testimonials that you can have all eight wheels shot out and keep rolling.”

A 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team Soldier told Lopez that he survived 11 different IEDs and went home safely with the rest of his unit, recalled Lopez with pride.

“It’s proven itself in combat situations,”

he said. “In both rural and urban fights, it continues to meet and exceed the expectations of the (Stryker) units.”

“It has proven many times over it can take the punishment of most IEDs in Iraq,” said Parke, “and more importantly is its mobility after an IED attack.

“We have Strykers drive away from an IED strike with all eight tires flat, roll into the (forward operating base), get refitted with new tires and equipment and be back on the streets

“The most lethal capability on the Stryker is the nine-man infantry squad that dismounts when the ramp drops.”

—Maj. Robbie Parke

within hours.

“That’s significantly different than a tracked vehicle. An IED strike that breaks the track of a Bradley or M1A2 (Abrahams) tank will disable the vehicle for several hours until the crew can either repair the track

or get the vehicle evacuated by other means. Those long hours sitting in a kill zone of an IED strike can be dangerous times for Soldiers with the enemy still watching,” he continued.

The Stryker’s survivability, and therefore the survivability of the Soldiers inside, make it stand out above the rest.

“It’s quiet, quick and lethal, and that’s the key,” said Lopez. “It can carry an entire squad of infantry and deliver them to their needed location quickly.”



Photo by Raymond Lopez

A Stryker is loaded onto a truck at Camp Arifjan prior to being transferred to a port and sent back to Alaska with the 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team.

“It is a ‘quick and rapid response of a lethal force,’” Lopez continued, just what Gen. Shinseki had in mind.

But the most important aspect of the Stryker is the force behind it. The men and women who use the Stryker everyday.

“The most lethal capability on the Stryker is the nine-man infantry squad that dismounts when the ramp drops,” said Parke.

The Stryker is a tool used by servicemembers to storm through enemy lines, flood the battlefield with trained Soldiers and bring wounded Soldiers back to the forward operating base and eventually home to their families.

The Stryker is an engineer vehicle helping build and repair a broken country, Iraq. It is a vessel used to carry leaders, fighters and medics.

“It’s great because of its mobility, its armor and the guys in the vehicles,” said Private 1st Class Jason Brown, an infantryman with the 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team.

Connected

Blue Force Tracker brings Iraq theater into one network

Sgt. Thomas L. Day
Desert Voice Staff Writer

The Blue Force Tracker system debuted in February of 1997 at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif., with one brigade of the 4th Infantry Division.

Nearly a decade later, 140,000 American troops in Iraq, a country more than 169,000 square miles, are connected into one Blue Force Tracker global communications network.

The Northrop Grumman Corporation, the world's third-largest defense contractor, developed the Blue Force Tracker system. Engineering Solutions & Products Inc., a New Jersey-based company contracted by the U.S. Department of Defense, handles field logistical issues and trains units at Camp Buehring, Kuwait.

"You have numerous contractors working hand-in-hand on this," said Thomas Lardner, a site manager with ES&P at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. "Once Northrop

There are five parts to the Force Battle Command Brigade-and-Below (FBCB-2) system: The Global Positioning System "Plugger", the touch-operated screen, the keyboard, the processing unit and the "trans-reciever." The trans-reciever, a conigated term for transmitter and reciever, can provide beyond-line-of-sight communication capabilities.



U.S. Army photo

Grumman puts out the software, we get a master copy of that and then we burn that software for the units,”

The Blue Force Tracker system, with the Force Battle Command Brigade-and-Below (FBCB-2) hardware, took a step forward by taking a step back last month. Days before the Christmas holiday, the system’s mainframe moved from Kuwait to the United States. Communiqués from Iraq are now sent across the Atlantic and then redirected back into theater.

“You can bring up the stuff in the States and see what’s going on in Iraq,” Lardner said.

Training in Kuwait

Two trainers are stationed in Kuwait to ensure that deploying units go north with adequate knowledge of the system. Kevin Marlow has been an instructor based at Fort Hood, Texas, for more than four years. He arrived in Kuwait in December to begin a six-month tour.

Already, Marlow has seen a pattern in whom often attends his class.

“The unit, they send who they want to,” Marlow said. “Primarily, they want to send key leaders...and drivers.” Drivers, Marlow explains, are often charged with keeping the system working.

“Everyone on the battlefield who has Blue Force Tracker also will know exactly where you’re at,” Marlow said. “It helps to protect the Soldier. It makes everyone aware where that vehicle is. It’s helps prevent fratricide.”

Marlow is quick to point out that the Blue Force Tracker is an information system, not just a communication platform.

It can also send instant messages to a command cell. The program has grid maps *and* overhead photo imagery loaded.

“All of it, with this application software,” Marlow said.



Photo by Sgt. Thomas L. Day

Kevin Marlow, an FBCB2 instructor for Engineering Solutions & Products Inc., sets up his system to connect with more than a thousand other systems in Iraq and Kuwait.

Pfc. Tiffany Bassett of the 705th Military Police Battalion trains on a FBCB2 system.



Photo by Sgt. Thomas L. Day

Sky Sailors:

Navy pilots based in Kuwait cont

Story and Photos by
Sgt. Sarah Scully
Desert Voice Staff Writer

Ducking under seven spinning 80-foot blades and into a hot rush of air tinged with the scent of oil and fuel, Soldiers quickly stepped past the “Righteous Hammer of Death” and entered the helicopter lifting them out of combat and toward home.

The .50 caliber machine gun

nicknamed by its operator pointed toward the Iraqi desert, scanning for terrorists.

Nestled within the “Black Stallion” MH-53E helicopter, dozens of Soldiers clutched bags of gear and looked out at their last glimpse of Iraq.

After a year in combat, they got a ride toward safety thanks to a military branch usually dedicated to operations at sea, not desert – the Navy pilots

and crew from the Helicopter Combat Support Squadron-4 “Black Stallions” unit at Camp Buehring, Udairi Army Airfield in Kuwait supporting Third Army/U.S. Army Central.

The gunners and crew orchestrated a routine perfected over nearly 12 months of experience ferrying troops and cargo between Iraq and Kuwait.

“Everybody’s proud of what they’re doing,” said Cmdr. Robert Buckingham, HC-4 commanding officer. “There will be a void when we leave.”

The Sailors filled in a much-needed request for combat support when the Army asked for help. Usually tasked to support a fleet of ships, the Sailors volunteered to do a unique mission.

“Everybody was gunning for orders to try and get here,” said Buckingham. “The Navy is inherently extremely flexible.”

That flexibility helped the unit succeed by adjusting to various mission requests and accomplishing them quickly. But soon, another unit will have to learn the same flexibility exhibited by the “Black Stallions.”

Later this month, the unit will return to home base in Italy after a year deployed. But until then, the Sailors will keep maintaining the huge helicopters and flying them on combat missions.

“I’m proud of the fact that we’re out here actually accomplishing our mission,” said Petty Officer 2nd Class Michael Weaver, an aviation structure



(Left) Two Navy crew chiefs from Helicopter Combat Support Squadron-4 load cargo into a MH-53E “Black Stallion” helicopter at an airfield in Iraq.

tribute to OIF aviation missions

mechanic. “It’s a pretty big effort, but we try and do it with a smile on our faces.”

With four MH-53E helicopters constantly operating, the unit has more than 100

Sailors dedicated to maintaining the triple-engine, 55-passenger aircraft.

“I have more respect for these kids now than when we started,” said

Chief Warrant Officer 4 Daniel Erb, maintenance materiel control officer. “This is my best deployment because of what they’ve done on these helicopters – they make it look easy.”

The Sailors not only do their jobs Navy-style, they also do it in the Army tradition by driving Humvees,

shooting M-16 rifles and wearing body armor.

With extra training, the Sailors work together to get the missions accomplished – and it all centers around the huge, gray helicopters.

Nicknamed “Bucky” after the squadron’s horse logo, the helicopters have carried more than 10,000 troops and 1 million pounds of cargo during the unit’s

deployment in Kuwait.

“They’re great,” said Spc. Timothy Tranger, a California National Guard Soldier getting a lift home after a year in Iraq. “They’ve given me a ride many times.”

Other Soldiers gave similar comments of appreciation for the

Sailors who risk their lives and aircraft flying combat missions.

Looking out over the desert at clusters of tents, flocks of sheep and lines of camels, the Sailors and Soldiers depend on the pilots to get them safely back on the ground.

Elevated above the passengers, the pilots kept a watch on hundreds of dials and knobs – and on the other helicopter carrying fellow servicemembers.

The troops unbuckled their safety straps and slid across the oily helicopter floor to the sand outside after landing safely in Kuwait.

Streaming out of the helicopter, the Soldiers gave a nod to the Sailor who manned the “Righteous Hammer of Death” and helped them out of Iraq.

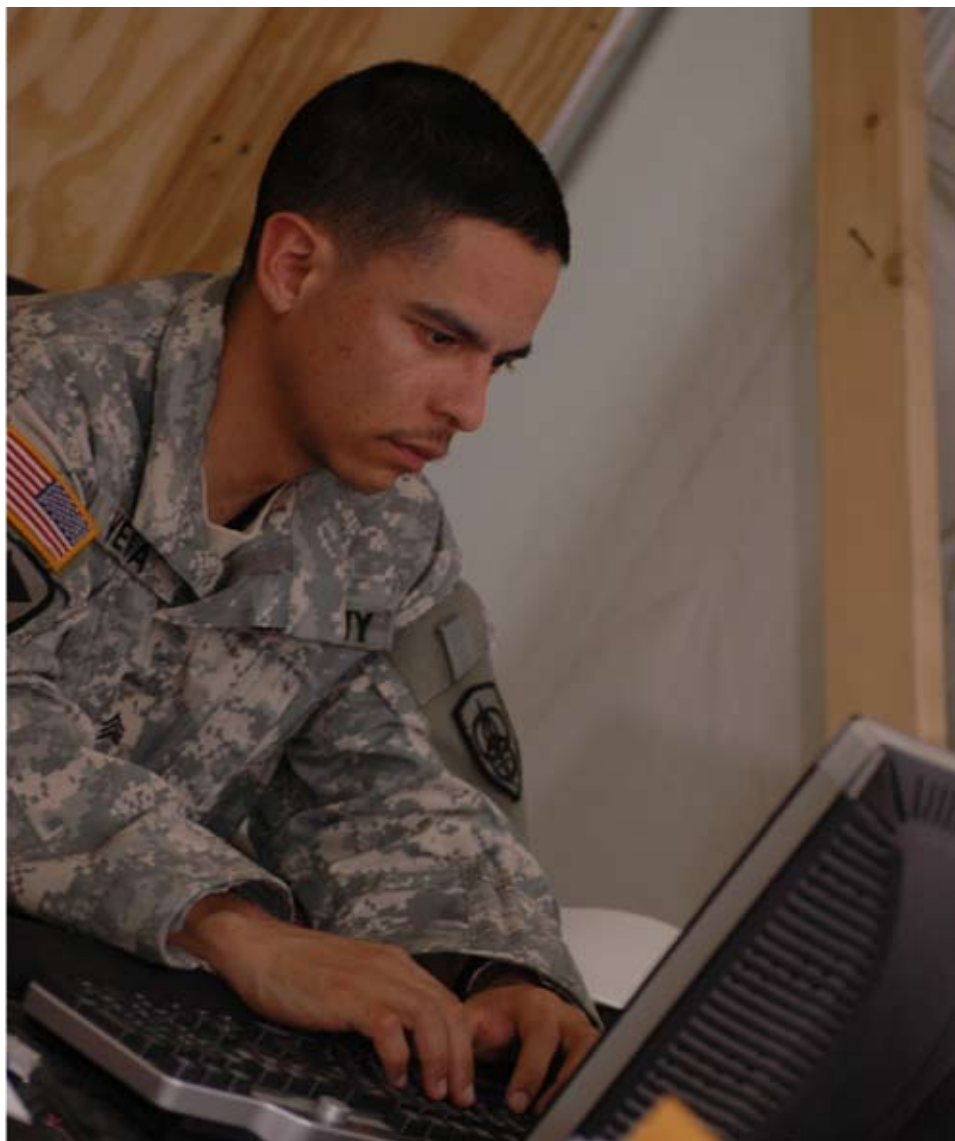
“They take care of us,” said Tranger.

“Everybody was gunning for orders to try and get here. The Navy is inherently extremely flexible.”

**Cmdr. Robert Buckingham,
HC-4 commanding officer**



Exiting Navy MH-53E “Black Stallion” helicopters at an airport in Kuwait, California National Guard Soldiers from Company B, 2nd Battalion, 185th Armor Regiment carry their gear and an American flag. The Soldiers had spent the past 12 months in Iraq.



Sgt. Mario Vega, a unit administrator with the 40th Personnel Support Detachment, 678th Personnel Services Battalion, spends much of his day helping his fellow servicemembers with various personnel issues, such as pay and promotions, during their deployment.

“We’re the first people in uniform they see when they get on the ground,” said Sgt. Kasey Schmidt, a supply sergeant with the 40th Personnel Support Detachment.

The Soldiers of the 40th PSD, 678th Personnel Services Battalion work as a bridge from the garrison environment to the theater, introducing servicemembers into Kuwait and eventually Iraq.

Other than making sure servicemembers’ paperwork and therefore their promotions and pay go smoothly, the 40th is there to greet those who are new to theater, said Sgt. Shawn Anderson, the noncommissioned officer in charge of personnel service support of the 40th PSD.

Swiping their common access card is the first step to kick off their countdown in theater, and then servicemembers are given the necessary briefings they need in order to stay as safe as possible and help everything run efficiently for them on the ground, said Anderson.

As a whole, the detachment’s job entails working promotions, making identification cards, completing enlisted and officer record brief updates, processing noncommissioned officer evaluation reports and managing the deployed theater accountability software, which tracks servicemembers on the ground so they receive their pay and all their entitlements as a deployed servicemember, said Sgt. 1st Class Fernando Cisneroz, the 40th PSD’s first sergeant.

The 40th is also responsible for actions, such as name changes, managing foreign language details, the married couples’ programs and applying skill level identifiers to the enlisted record briefs of Army Soldiers, said Noah Radley, a personnel services clerk with the 40th PSD.

Simply put, “Our function here is taking care of Soldiers before they go up north,” said Cisneroz of his unit.

So when servicemembers are weary and travel worn, the last thing they have to worry about is whether or not they will receive the correct pay or whether they will make the next rank even though they are in the field.

Kuwait Soldiers give warm welcome to fellow troops

Story and photo by
Spc. Debrah A. Robertson
Desert Voice Assistant Editor

After saying goodbye to their families, their children and their parents, and days of travel with no showers and living on trail mix and airplane food, Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen and Coast Guardsmen drag their duffle bags onto buses and prepare to travel to Camp Buehring for weeks of training with Third Army/U.S. Army

Central and other units in the extreme temperatures of Kuwait.

Loaded with heavy equipment, plated protective vests, rifles, advanced combat helmets, sleeping bags, ruck sacks and scores of necessary gear, weary troops drag themselves into a large tent and take their seats before a projection screen.

To their relief they are met with the smiling, friendly faces of fellow servicemembers who have been in their position, tired and a little nervous about the unknown.

Tax Center to open soon

Information provided by

Mary Marlowe,
Chief of Client Services

For deployed troops looking to file their taxes in Kuwait, a facility on Camp Arifjan will be opening soon to help with just that.

The Camp Arifjan Tax Center will open Jan. 30 in Zone 6 and be available to deployed servicemembers, as well as Department of Defense civilians and contracted military retirees.

The Tax Center is the product of contributions from the 377th Theater Support Command and Third Army/U.S. Army Central.

Although all deployed servicemembers are given an automatic 180-day extension to the April 15 deadline, state tax deadlines vary from state to state.

Each state views state taxes differently. While

most states have some type of extension for filing taxes for deployed servicemembers, it is not necessarily the same as the federal extension.

To check on the requirements of your state, contact the Tax Center or check with your state's Department of Revenue.

The 180-day federal extension begins the day the servicemember leaves the deployed environment.

For help from the Tax Center, you will need the following documents: military identification card, proof of social security number, tax and income documents such as W-2s, bank routing and account information for direct deposit.

In addition to the military extension, there is a two month extension for U.S. citizens residing overseas.

Just One Question...

What was your New Year's resolution?



335th Theater Signal Command

The 335th Theater Signal Command, from East Point, Ga., is currently stationed in Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. The unit provides theater level signal support for the Army Central Command's area of operation.

If your unit would like to be featured in this section call 430-6334 to schedule a time.



"To exemplify the very highest standards of ethical and moral behavior to other Soldiers."

Master Sgt. Seketha Roberson
Transportation NCOIC
335th TSC (Provisional)
Forkland, Ala.



"Complete my military novel and find a publisher or agent."

Master Sgt. David Cooper
Human resources specialist
335th TSC (Provisional)
Portland, Ore.



"Drink less Mountain Dew and save enough money to buy a Cracker Barrel or my own Waffle House."

Capt. Tom Akerlund
Deputy chief of staff
335th TSC (Provisional)
Wilson, N.C.



"Stay in church."

Master Sgt. Jacquelyn Smiley
Senior human resources NCO
335th TSC (Provisional)
Wichita Falls, Tx.

Hometown Hero

Sgt. 1st Class Louis Bailey,
PB NCOIC, G-4 335th TSC

Bailey ensures accountability is maintained in Third Army/U.S. Army Central's Chemical Stockpile Disposal Program.

Bailey talks about what he misses about his hometown, Champaign, Ill.

"Heavy snowfall, family reunions and my parents."



FORSCOM musicians perform holiday concert in Kuwait

Story and Photos by
Sgt. Thomas L. Day
Desert Voice Staff Writer

Lt. Gen. R. Steven Whitcomb, the Third Army/U.S. Army Central commanding general, had an idea this holiday season. The U.S. Forces Command's Ground Forces Band had played for Whitcomb before; for his fifth Christmas deployed, the Third Army commander wanted the band to play for his Soldiers in Kuwait.

"They have a habitual relationship with U.S. ARCENT," said Lt. Col. Bob Cassidy, the Third Army's Special Troops Battalion commander. "They played at two U.S. ARCENT picnics... this is the first time we've asked them to come over to support us in theater."

The request was granted, and the Ground Forces Band landed in Kuwait City on December 15. They couldn't bring the entire 54-member band, but a special "Christmas Caroling" team came to Camp Arifjan and the American Embassy in Kuwait to spread some yuletide spirit.



(Clockwise from top) The Ground Forces Band, conducted by 1st Lt. Randall Bartel, performs for the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait; the Ground Forces Band during a performance at the U.S. Embassy; Sgt. Brian Talley plays his trombone for the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait.

